SOME NEW BOOKS.

A Life of Thackeray.

We are indebted to Messrs. H. S. Stone & Co. for two volumes collectively entitled *The Life of William Makepeace Thackeray*, by LEWIS MELVILLE. There has long been current an impression that Thackeray did not desire a biography of himself to be written; the wish, whether expressed by him or not, has been respected by his family, though the want has been, to some extent, supplied in the so-called biographical edition of his works edited by one of his daughters. In spite of the supposed injunction, not a few biographical and critical estimates of Thackeray have been published; perhaps the best known of these was written by Anthony Trollope, and appeared in the "English Men of Letters" series. Since the field had been already invaded, we know of no reason why Mr. Melville should not attempt to glean from it more copiously, and it is certain that none could undertake the task in a more sympathetic spirit. If there be, indeed, any objection to the work, it is not one that could come gracefully from the novelist's family, for throughout, except in connection with a single incident, the present biographer's attitude is one of unqualified admiration and approval. For that very reason, the final estimate of Thackeray, considered both as a literary artist and as a man, remains to be produced; meanwhile, we should be grateful for the abundant data which Mr. Melville has collected from innumerable sources. We shall avail ourselves of the book to throw light on certain questions which are often mooted in regard to Thackeray, namely, What was the social status which belonged to him by birth and by early surroundings; how came he to take up literature as a profession; how did it happen that his genius was so tardily recognized; did he ever gain a pecuniary success as well as fame by his writings; was his conduct in the Yates incident deserving of commendation, and, what place did he attain in the literature of the Victorian Age?

I.

Thackeray used to say that it took three generations to make a gentleman, though he was faithless to this rule, when he depicted Col. Newcome, whose father had begun life as a weaver, and whose mother was a weaver's daughter. He himself, however, satisfied the test. His paternal grandfather, William Makepeace Thackeray, was a conspicuous civil servant in India, where he amassed a fortune, and where he married the daughter of Lieut.-Col. Webb, a descendant of the victor of Weynandal, who is portrayed in "Esmond." The novelist's father was Richmond Thackeray, who, after rising through various posts in the India service, became Collector of Customs in the Calcutta districts, the most important appointment in the Governor-General's gift. He married Anne Becher, a connection of Richard Becher, who held high office during Lord Clive's administration. After her husband's death the future novelist's mother married Capt. Carmichael Smyth, who is generally supposed to have been the prototype, or, at least, one of the prototypes, of Col. Newcome. Leaving India, at the age of 4, for England with his mother, the boy was first sent to a school in Chiswick Mall, and afterward to Charterhouse, which figures in his novels as Greyfriars. Charterhouse, we scarcely need point out, does not figure in the first rank of English public schools with Eton and Harrow, or even in the second rank with Westminster, Winchester and Rugby. According to his schoolfellows, Thackeray never became a first-rate classical scholar, neither did he evince any taste for the field sports in which his comrades delighted. Even at school, however, he began to write parodies and other verses, some of which are reprinted in the first of the volumes before us. In February, 1829, when he was not yet 18, having been born in July, 1811, Thackeray went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, accompanied by his stepfather, Major Smyth, just as Arthur Pendennis was accompanied by his uncle, the Major. He stayed at Cambridge for two years, and then went down without taking his degree. The same thing has been true of many other Englishmen of genius, who have looked to Cambridge as their alma mater, including names so comparatively recent as those of Byron, Wordsworth and Tennyson. According to his own account, he "read a tremendous lot of history," and it is suggested that at this time he laid the foundation of his love for the writers of the eighteenth century. He seems to have spoken at the Union, but he never became a successful speaker. At Cambridge, however, Thackeray contributed to a little weekly paper called the *Snob*, and in 1829 he intended to compete for the Chancellor's medal for an English poem on the subject of Timbuctoo, but he did not finish his verses on the day appointed for delivery. As the poem was practically a satire on the choice of subject, it would in any event have had no chance of obtaining the prize, which was awarded to Alfred Tennyson. In spite of Trollope's contrary belief, the present biographer opines that Thackeray's university career did him a great deal of good. Certainly his studies were carried to no great depth, but he acquired a general knowledge of many things which later proved of use. Thackeray himself never underrated the value of a classical education, and once when Kinglake laughed at the practice of drilling boys at Eton for five or six years in Latin composition, Thackeray said to him: "It has made you what you are." It was at Cambridge, according to Mr. Richmond Ritchie that his social status became fixed. Though he was afterward to consort with the bohemian acquaintances into which a man is forced by adversity, he was never a genuine bohemian himself, but always faithful to the traditions of the class in which he had been born and bred. Attention is here directed to the fact that Sir Walter Besant and many others have professed themselves unable to understand how Thackeray could have known enough of the ways of the Upper Ten to be able to depict society (*the* society) in "Vanity Fair," since, they insist, it was only after the success of that book that he obtained the entree into those exclusive circles. The present biographer would remind them that Thackeray was the son, and, for that matter, the grandson, of well-to-do people belonging to the upper-middle class, that he had a public school and university education, and that, at Cambridge, he made lasting friendships with such men as Edward Fitzgerald, Alfred Tennyson, W. H. Thompson, R. C. Trench, John Sterling, James Spedding and Monckton Milnes. According to Bagehot, the value of an English university training always consists more in the friendships formed with fellow students than in the actual studies and examinations. This proved to be conspicuously the fact in the case of George Canning, and, we may add, of Mr. Gladstone.

After coming down from Trinity, Cambridge, Thackeray took a course of German lessons in London, and then travelled, for a time, upon the Continent, spending several months at Paris, Rome, Dresden and Weimar respectively. His German travels were to bear fruit in "Vanity Fair" and other stories, and his Paris experiences in "The Newcomes" and "Philip."

In the autumn of 1831 he entered himself as a student of the Middle Temple, and, though he gave but little time to the reading of law, was, ultimately, admitted to the bar. He never altered his opinion that the bar is a cold-blooded profession at best, and that a lawyer must think of nothing all his life long but law. In July, 1831, he had come of age, and it was but a few years before his patrimony was dissipated. About the size of his inheritance, there are contradictory accounts; William Hunter mentions £20,000 as the sum; but the author of the present biography is inclined to think that the money inherited from his father could not have been safely invested so as to produce an income of more than four hundred or five hundred pounds. It does not matter; luckily for Thackeray's readers it was dissipated, and he had to earn his livelihood. It is well known that he first intended to become a painter, and, to that end, spent some time in the Paris studios; to the end of his life he designed many of the cuts by which his writings were illustrated. At the last he was much fonder of drawing than of writing. James Payn has recorded that Thackeray told him the first money he ever received in literature was from G. W. M. Reynolds. When contributions from him were first accepted by *Fraser* (*Blackwood* never printed any) is not known, but it is certain that he began to write for the magazine before 1835. No article, however, has yet been positively identified as Thackeray's before November, 1837. Mr. Taylor says that, as early as 1834, Thackeray was an established contributor to *Fraser*, and recognized as worthy to take a permanent place in the brilliant staff of that magazine. When the *Constitutional* collapsed in July, 1837, it swept away not only all that was left of Thackeray's patrimony, but most of the fortune of his stepfather, Major Smyth. Less than a year before Thackeray had married Isabella Shawe, daughter of Col. Matthew Shawe. He was then entirely dependent upon his salary as Paris correspondent of the *Constitutional*. The young couple settled in Paris in the Rue St. Augustine. Those who recall the ballad of "Bouillabaisse" may like to know that the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs, with its restaurant, was quite close. When the married pair came back to London they stayed with Major Smyth for awhile and then moved to Great Coram street. Having now no regular source of income Thackeray plunged into work with immense energy, and wrote for many magazines and papers, including, besides *Fraser's Magazine*, *Bentley's Miscellany*, *Colburn's New Monthly Magazine*, *Cruikshank's Omnibus* and *Comic Almanacs*, the *Times*, the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Globe* and *Gagliani's Messenger*. He said in 1848 that, ten years before, he used to work for *Gagliani* very cheerfully for ten francs a day. He would supply drawings also to anybody who would pay for them. When "Ernest Maltravers" fell to him for criticism he applied the lash with the utmost vigor, but, in this article, as in comments on other novels by Bulwer, he showed what might be easily construed as a personal animus. From November, 1837, until August, 1838, appeared the "Yellowplush Correspondence," but these papers were carefully revised before their republication. In the last named year appeared "Mr. Deuceace at Paris," "The End of Mr. Deuceace's History," and "Mr. Yellowplush's Ajew."

In 1861, a common friend of Thackeray and Lord Lytton wrote to the latter: "I saw Thackeray at Folkestone. He spoke of you a great deal and said he would give worlds to burn some of his writings, especially some lampoons written in his youth. He wished so much to see you and express his contrition." Shortly after this Lord Lytton received a letter from Thackeray himself in which the latter said: "There are two performances especially (among the critical and biographical works of the erudite Mr. Yellowplush) which I am sorry to see reproduced, and I ask pardon of the author of 'The Caxtons' for a lampoon, which I know he himself has forgiven, and which I wish I could recall." The performances referred to were prompted by Thackeray's sense of the overstrained sentimentality which was so prevalent in Bulwer's earlier works.

During 1839, Thackeray, who was naturally anxious to increase his income, which, when all the claims upon his purse were satisfied, must have been meagre enough, endeavored to obtain the post of sub-editor to the *Morning Chronicle*, but without success. About the same time a friend recommended him to Cobden for service in the Anti-Corn-Law League, and he eventually contributed two wood-cuts to the Anti-Corn-Law circular. It was in 1842 that Thackeray made his first contribution to *Punch*, and he did not finally cease to write for that paper until 1854. For ten years he poured much of his best work into it, furnishing duologues, sketches, love letters, thumb-nail drawings, criticisms, political skits, social satires, poems, parodies, caricatures and even illustrations to other writers' works. He was, in fact, during this period, *Punch's* principal literary supporter. An event which marked an epoch in his literary life occurred in 1844. We refer to the publication in *Fraser's* from January to December of "The Luck of Barry Lyndon, a Romance of the Last Century, by Fitz-Boodle." The story met with no great success during its publication, but the discerning few who had appreciated the merits of "The Great Hoggarty Diamond," were now convinced that they had discovered a man of genius who must leave an impression upon the pages of Victorian literature.

II.

We should now pause to glance at the chapter which deals with Thackeray's married life. He had married, as we have seen in 1836. Four years later, after the birth of his third child, his wife fell seriously ill, and the illness eventually affected her mind. Thackeray, believing that the mental disorder would pass away when her health was restored, threw his writing aside, sent his children to their grandparents at Paris, and, for many months, travelled with his wife from one watering place to another hoping against hope that the cloud on her intellect would dissolve. At last he was compelled to realize the truth that she would never recover sufficiently to resume the duties of a mother and a wife. She still took interest in any pleasant things around her, especially music, but it was essential that she should be properly cared for, and with this object, she was placed with a Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, at Leigh, in Essex. She outlived her husband many years; indeed, it was not until January, 1894, that the announcement of her death was made in the newspapers. How much he loved her, and how much he felt the blow that had shattered his home he never divulged; he was not a man to parade his domestic sorrows in public. Nevertheless, from one source and another, the author of this biography has been able to glean some indications of the grief which Thackeray felt on his return alone to his desolate house. "I was as happy as the day was long with her," he told one of his chums; and, one day, when Trollope's groom said to him: "I hear you have written a book upon Ireland and are always making fun of the Irish. You don't like us," Thackeray's eyes filled with tears as he thought of his wife—born in County Cork—and he replied, turning away his head: "God help me, all that I have loved best in the world is Irish." Again in after years, referring to "The Great Hoggarty Diamond," which was composed during this period of great unhappiness, he remarked that it "was written at a time when the writer was suffering under the severest personal grief and calamity," "at a time of great affliction when my heart was very soft and humble. Amen. *Ich habe auch gelebt.*" From this time more than ever the thought of his children was the mainspring of most of his actions. "I sat up with the children and talked to them of their mother," he told Mrs. Woodfield; "it is my pleasure to tell them how humble-minded their mother was." It was for the sake of his children that he battled with his constitutional timidity and nerved himself to deliver the two series of lectures—he to whom public speaking was misery; and solely on their account he made his two trips to America, hating the seperation from them, and longing during all the long time of his absence for the day of his return. It is with some of Thackeray's own words that Mr. Melville closes his brief account of the tragedy of the novelist's married life. "Canst thou, O friendly reader, count upon the fidelity of an artless heart or tender or true, and reckon among the blessings which Heaven hath bestowed on thee, the love of faithful women? Purify thine own heart and try to make it worthy of theirs. All the prizes of life are nothing compared to that one. All the rewards of ambition, wealth, pleasure are only vanity and disappointment, grasped at greedily and fought for fiercely, and over and over again found worthless by the wearied winners."

This seems also to be the place to notice Thackeray's experience of club life. Being deprived of a home while he was still under thirty, he of necessity lived as a bachelor, went everywhere, and saw everything. It is to be noted, however, that he never forgot the peculiar position in which he was placed. He did his best to be happy, and made the best of his life as his philosophy taught him, but there was no vice of it, and, in spite of his enemies, made chiefly by criticisms and satirical writings, no word of scandal was ever breathed against him. He had long been a member of the Garrick which then had its house in King street, Covent Garden. This was his favorite resort. The immense influence he obtained here was shown nearly twenty years later, when he quarrelled with Edmund Yates, a quarrel to which we may presently refer. He was elected a member of the Reform Club in April, 1840. No man has made more use of this club in his writings. It is described minutely in "Brown's Letters to His Nephew," made its own contribution to the "Snob Papers," and figures in many of his novels. In 1850 he was put up at the Athenæum Club, but was blackballed, to the intense indignation of his supporters. In the following year, however, he was elected under a rule providing for the annual introduction of a certain number of persons of distinguished eminence in science, literature or for public services, without recourse to ballots. His name appears on the roll of this club as a "barrister," but, of course, he was elected as the author of "Vanity Fair," "Pendennis" and other well-known works of fiction. In 1856 he was rejected by the Travellers, where the balloting was by the members, not by the committee, the ruling majority giving as a reason that they were afraid of seeing themselves in some novel of the future. In later years, about November, 1861, he joined "Our Club," which had been founded by Douglas Jerrold. Thackeray was also a frequent visitor to places of a different kind. He loved Bohemia, and has left a description of that country in the "Adventures of Philip," the last but one of his novels. "A pleasant land," he calls it, "a land of song, a land over which hangs an endless fog occasioned by much tobacco, a land where soda water flows freely in the morning, a land of lotus eating (with lots of cayenne pepper), a land where men call each other by their Christian names, where most are old, where almost all are young, and where, if a few oldsters enter, it is because they have preserved more tenderly and carefully than others their youthful spirits and the delightful capacity to be idle. I have lost my way to Bohemia now, but it is certain that Prague is the most picturesque city in the world." Thackeray was an original member of the Fielding Club which succeeded the Cyder-Cellars Club, and was established in 1852. His three favorite haunts were the "Coal Hole," the "Cyder-Cellars" and "Evans's," which he began to frequent soon after he came of age, and which he continued to visit frequently until his children began to grow into companions for him.

Here we may note what Mr. Melville has to say about the Yates incident, the only one in Thackeray's life which his true friends may see some reason to regret. Thackeray and Yates were both members of the Garrick Club. They were both literary men, though the younger man had not yet "arrived," and they seem to have been on terms of friendship if we may judge from a letter written by Thackeray in 1855, and reproduced in this book. Less than three years later, Yates was appointed the editor of *Town Talk*, and, having written a pen-and-ink sketch of Dickens which was a success, he followed it with a portrait of Thackeray, in which he accused the novelist of flattering the aristocracy in England, but of making in the United States George Washington the idol of his worship. A want of heart was also imputed to all the novelist's writings. Thackeray, who was at all times acutely sensitive to criticism, was made intensely angry and indignant by this article. He hated "personal" journalism, and he held that, in Yates's case, the offence was unpardonable. To him the article appeared a gratuitous insult from a fellow clubman to whom he had held out the hand of friendship. He wrote a severe letter to Yates, who, on his part, forthwith penned a reply, in which, while urging that he had not meant all that Thackeray had read into his article, he reminded him of similar misdemeanors committed by himself in his youth against fellow clubmen, as, for example, against Dr. Lardner, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Mr. Stephen Price, Mr. Wyndham Smith, and Capt. Granby Calcroft in "The Book of Snobs," and, above all, in later days, against Mr. Andrew Arcedeckne, who had been caricatured as Foker in "Pendennis." Mr. Melville believes that, had this letter been sent, Thackeray would have let the matter drop, for the *tu quoque* argument was irristible. Unfortunately, Yates showed the letter to Dickens, who, thinking it too flippant, drafted another which was neither dignified nor wise on the part of a man, who, after all, was the offender. At the time, it was believed, and the belief has not since been refuted, that Dickens conducted the affair in a spirit distinctly hostile to Thackeray. At all events Thackeray took the strange step of sending the correspondence between himself and Yates to the committee of the Garrick Club, in which he appealed to the committee to say whether the practice of publishing such articles as that which he enclosed would not be fatal to the conduct of the club and intolerable in a society of gentlemen. Yates protested that the committee was incompetent to enter into the matter, since there was no mention of the club in the article. The objection was over-ruled, and the committee decided that the offender should apologize to Thackeray or retire from the club. Yates, after consulting Dickens, John Forster and others, determined to appeal to the general meeting, at which, however, in spite of all the efforts of Dickens and Wilkie Collins, backed by Samuel Lover, Robert Bell, Palgrave Simpson, Sir James Ferguson and other influential men, the resolution to support the committee was carried by seventy against forty-six. No apology being made to Thackeray by Yates, the secretary of the club informed the latter that the committee had erased his name from the list of members.

The feud thus begun did not end quickly. Thackeray, it was thought, made veiled allusions to the journalist in "The Virginians." Yates, on his part, fed the flame by sarcastic references to his opponent in the *Lounger* column of the *Illustrated Times*, until, on Jan. 29, 1859, he brought about a crisis by writing a spiteful travesty of "Bouillabaisse." Half a dozen of the most valued members of the newspaper's staff at once threatened to resign in a body unless the offending versifier were dismissed. A compromise, however, was effected on the condition that Yates should make no further reference to Thackeray, who, in his turn, never again alluded to the journalist in his novels. Yates, eventually, saw the bad taste of the article in *Town Talk*, and, when the *Cornhill Magazine* was established, sent to the editor without remark a poem which he hoped would be regarded as an olive branch. It was returned by the editor's secretary with the curt observation that he was "desired by Mr. Thackeray to return the enclosed." Yates, however, nobly revenged himself somewhat later, when, on Thackeray's death, he wrote a beautiful obituary notice that is quoted in the second of these volumes. It was always Yates's impression that, after the first outbreak of indignation, Thackeray was more angry with Dickens than with him, and that the affair, much to his detriment, was transformed into a trial of strength between the two novelists. Mr. Jeaffreson supports this opinion by declaring that Thackeray said to him, "You must not think, young 'un, that I am quarrelling with Mr. Yates. *I am hitting the man behind him*." The breach of kindly relations which the Yates incident caused between Thackeray and Dickens has led to much speculation as to whether any real friendship had at any time existed between the great rivals. It is certain that, up to the occurrence of that incident, Thackeray had never lost an opportunity of paying graceful tribute to Dickens in his books or in his lectures, and his private correspondence had been full of testimony to his appreciation of his rival's work. Nevertheless, he is reported to have said at one time: "He [Dickens] can't forgive me for my success with '*Vanity Fair*,' as if there were not room in the world for both of us;" and, at another time: "Dickens is making ten thousand a year. He is very angry at me for saying so, but I *will* say it, for it is true. He doesn't like me. He knows that my books are a protest against his—that, if the one set are true, the other must be false. But 'Pickwick' is an exception. It is a capital book. It is like a glass of good English ale." On the whole, Mr. Melville opines that, in Dickens, the subject of this biography admired the author rather than the man. "Genial? Yes," Thackeray once said of Dickens; "but frank?" A twinkle came over the spectacles. "Well, frank as an oyster."

It was in January, 1847, that the first number of "Vanity Fair" was brought out by Messrs. Bradbury and Evans, the proprietors of *Punch*. To this day a belief exists, in which Trollope and others have shared, that this novel was hawked around the town, and rejected everywhere. The evidence collected by Mr. Melville points to a different conclusion. He is convinced that Mr. Vizetelly, who saw a great deal of Thackeray about that period, has told the true tale. "The hawking about of 'Vanity Fair,' writes Mr. Vizetelly, "of course presupposes that the manuscript was complete, and was submitted in this state to the half-score fatuous fools who declined it with thanks. But I am posiuve that, when arrangements were made with Messrs. Bradbury and Evans for the publication of the work, with no further knowledge on their part of its nature than could be gleaned from Mr. Thackeray during a brief interview, nothing beyond No. 1 was written. I have no doubt whatever that the publishers of 'Vanity Fair' bought it, as most works by known authors are purchased, solely on its writer's reputation, which his 'Snobs of England' in *Punch* had greatly extended." It is interesting to learn that Bradbury and Evans agreed to pay 50 guineas for each of the twenty monthly parts of "Vanity Fair"; each part was to include, besides the two sheets of letter-press, a couple of etchings and the initials at the beginning of the chapters. Mr. Vizetelly's account is to some extent supported by what Mr. Taylor says in his "Life of Thackeray:" "Some time before 1846 Thackeray had sketched some chapters entitled 'Pencil Sketches of English Society,' which he had offered to Colburn for insertion in the *New Monthly Magazine*. These chapters were to form a portion of a continuous story of a length not determined. They were rejected by Colburn after consideration." It appears that when Thackeray offered the fragment of the story which thus far was merely outlined he had not thought of the title which subsequently occurred to him in the middle of the night.

III.

Before "Vanity Fair" was finished Thackeray had become a personage, and was in his proper place among the foremost men of the day. How did it happen that he attained to eminence so late? A good while afterward, he, himself, complained that he was nearly 40 years old before he was recognized in literature as belonging to a class of writers at all above the ordinary magazinists of his day. "I turned off far better things then," he said "than I do now. And I wanted money sadly. (My parents were rich, but respectable, and I had spent all my guineas in my youth); yet how little I got for my work. It makes me laugh at what the *Times* pays me now when I think of the old days, and how much better I wrote for them then, and got a shilling where I now get ten." It is a fact that Thackeray was 38 years old when the last number of "Vanity Fair" was published. Disraeli, on the other hand, became famous as the author of "Vivian Grey" at two and twenty; Dickens had written "Pickwick" when he was five and twenty, and "Oliver Twist," "Nicholas Nickleby," "The Old Curiosity Shop" and "Barnaby Rudge" before he was 30. Thackeray, as we have said, before the appearance of "Vanity Fair," was unknown beyond a narrow circle. It has been said that this was due to the fact that his genius took longer to mature than that of his contemporary Dickens. Mr. Melville does not accept this explanation, but we are inclined to give some weight to it, for Thackeray was a realist, and refused to paint life, except as he saw it, and, of course, he needed time to see it. Dickens is an idealist. So was Disraeli in his early novels. So was Bulwer before he wrote "The Caxtons." Anthony Trollope would solve the problem in another way. He says that Thackeray had a marked want of assurance. "I can fancy," says Trollope, "that, as the sheets went from him every day, he told himself with regard to every sheet that it was a failure. Dickens was quite sure of his sheet." Admitting the want of self-confidence, we do not draw from it the same deduction that Trollope drew. Such a lack of complacency tends to make work better rather than worse, and should have led to his triumph earlier than it did. As Mr. Melville points out, Thackeray was an artist to his finger tips, and, while lesser men might turn away from their completed task with a self-satisfied smile, Thackeray would glance at his mournfully, re-read it, perhaps, and think, not whether the public would like it, but how far from perfect in his eyes were the pages he had written. All his life long he was conscious that his work might be improved, and it was always with a sigh that he sent the sheets from him to the printer.

As for Trollope's imputation of idleness, it is true that Thackerary was unable to follow Trollope's practice of grinding out so many words in so many hours daily, a grotesque distortion of *nulla dies, nulla linea*. No one, however, who remembers the enormous quantity of copy that he produced will, for a moment, listen to the charge. The principal reason for the fact that Thackeray had to wait for adequate recognition until the appearance of "Vanity Fair" is discerned by the author of this biography, namely, that, previously, Thackeray had not given the public a fair chance to discover him. "Remember the number of pseudonyms. Had he chosen always to write over the pen-name of Titmarsh, this would have been immaterial. The name Titmarsh would have been as much appreciated as the name Thackeray should have been. But, besides his contributions to *Punch* over various fantastic signatures, and his anonymous work for magazines and journals, it was Michael Angelo Titmarsh who wrote most of the reviews in *Fraser's Magazine*, 'The Great Hoggarty Diamond,' 'The Sketch Book,' and a host of short stories; it was Ikey Solomon who wrote 'Catherine,' and it was Yellowplush who wrote the 'Correspondence and Diary,' and, finally, it was Major Gahagan who wrote his own 'Tremendous Adventures,' 'The Professor,' and 'Sultan Stork,' and who supplied Mr. Wagstaff with material for one of the four stories credited to that gentleman. Again, Fitz-Boodle wrote his own 'Confessions,' 'Professions,' 'Men's Wives,' and 'The Luck of Barry Lyndon,' while Thackeray wrote under his own name only 'Captain Rook' 'Mr. Pigeon,' 'The Fashionable Authoress,' and 'Going to See a Man Hanged.'" This state of things rendered it difficult, even for the initiated, to recognize all his works, and to the average reader, of course, each different name suggested a different author. Thackeray himself comprehended that this was not the high road to fame. "It cannot be denied," he wrote in "Brown on the Press," "that men of signal ability will write for years in papers and perish unknown, and in so far their lot is a hard one, and the chances of life are against them. It is hard upon a man with whose work the whole town is ringing that not a soul should know or care who is the author who so delights the public."

We are also reminded by Mr. Melville that the only *books* Thackeray had published before "Vanity Fair" were "The Paris Sketch Book" and "Comic Tales and Sketches," which consisted of reprinted magazine articles not possessing the greatest value; also "The Irish Sketch Book" and "From Cornhill to Grand Cairo," both interesting and cleverly written, but not calculated to make a great sensation; and the notoriously unpopular "Second Funeral of Napoleon." Nobody will pretend that these books showed that a new genius had arisen; to this day they are among the least read of Thackeray's works. It may, of course, be objected that Mr. Melville has here overlooked the best of Thackeray's early writings, to wit: "The Great Hoggarty Diamond," "The Luck of Barry Lyndon" and "The Snobs of England." He has purposely avoided naming these, he tells us, because the first two stories had only appeared in the periodicals, and the last was in the course of appearing in *Punch*. Besides, not one of these works had yet appeared in book form, and few, if any, among the public at large knew that the Snobographer was Titmarsh, author of "the Great Hoggarty Diamond," and also Fitz-Boodle, author of "The Luck of Barry Lyndon."

In our author's opinion, this simple explanation furnishes the true solution of the somewhat complex problem presented by the tardiness of Thackeray's fame. To those readers who may yet be unconvinced, he suggests an additional argument. Let us suppose two impossible things, namely, that the British public, with wonderful discernment, had recognized all of Thackeray's pseudonymous writings, and let us further suppose that, recognizing them, the public had had every chance to read them, and had read them. How much would the situation have changed? Not very much in Mr. Melville's judgment. Thackeray would have been more appreciated by a few, perhaps, but just as much neglected by the many. One important reason for such neglect is that, while most of his contemporaries, including conspicuously, Dickens, Bulwer, and Lever, appealed to the gallery, and were not above playing to it, Thackeray, far from deigning to lower himself to the public, held it to be the duty of an artist to educate it to his own intellectual standard; a performance painfully slow and not remunerative to the tutor, as Mr. George Meredith has learned. Nobody knew better than Thackeray what would suit the majority of novel buyers; yet, knowing this, and anxious as he was to obtain the approbation of his feminine readers, he stoutly and deliberately wrote on in his own way, preaching his own philosophy, and indulging in his own satiric humor; even the finest work he produced before "Vanity Fair," namely, "The Luck of Barry Lyndon," must be included in the same class as Fielding's "Jonathan Wild," a composition which has never been popular with the general reader.

Mr. Melville would further support his thesis, that Thackeray, before the appearance of "Vanity Fair" would not have been a popular writer, even had his writings been more widely known, with the sweeping assertion that all his earlier work, (with the possible exception of "Major Gahagan"), in spite of its cleverness, in spite of its wit and wisdom, and in spite of, or more probably because of its very truth, is most unpleasant and painful reading. "I really don't know," said Thackeray to Mr. John Esten Cooke, "where I get all these rascals for my books. I have certainly never lived with such people." Of course, almost all the earlier books are clever; "Catherine" is wonderful, as Carlyle said, and no one but Fielding and its author could have written "Barry Lyndon," but there is in them, as poor Yates said, a want of heart and lack of tenderness, and the books have really kept their position by virtue of the genius that created them. One is impressed by the author, but depressed by the book. Was the public wrong in not admiring them? Is it not a truism that a story suggesting solely or chiefly the cleverness or the wit or the brilliancy of the writer is not a complete success; that the very predominance of that suggestion shows there is something wanting in the story itself? Is not the taste which demands that the writer's genius shall not be thought of until the book is laid down justifiable? In one of his own reviews, Thackeray had prayed: "Oh! for a little manly, honest, God-relying simplicity, cheerful, unaffected and humble!" It was only with "Vanity Fair," however, that he began to give these things to the public.

IV.

"I wonder whether this will take, and whether the world will read it," Thackeray said when he began to write "Vanity Fair;" and, though the publishers had accepted it, it still seemed doubtful for a time whether the world would read. The earlier numbers failed to attract attention, and the advisability of stopping its publication was mooted, but, luckily, later in the year, the sale increased with great strides, and the success of the venture was assured. Many different reasons have been suggested for the change from failure to brilliant success. Some will have it that the change in the public attitude was the result of an article in the *Edinburgh Review* for January, 1848, while others insist that the attention of the world was attracted to the novel by Currer Bell's eulogistic dedication to Thackeray prefixed to the second edition of "Jane Eyre." Thackeray, himself, always contended that it was the success of his first Christmas book, "Mrs. Perkyns's Ball," brought out in December, 1847, which made him popular. Mr. Melville has no doubt that the *Review*, the Christmas book, and especially, the dedication, each gave an impetus to the sale of the novel, but he thinks that the probable explanation is the simplest, namely, that the book recommended itself by the greater interest found in its pages as it progressed. This view is supported to a certain extent by a letter written in May, 1847, by Fitzgerald: "Thackeray is progressing greatly in his lines; he publishes a novel in numbers—'Vanity Fair'—which began dull, I thought, but gets better every number." Not every one, however, had found even the earlier parts dull. Mrs. Carlyle wrote in September, 1847, to her husband: "I brought away the last four numbers of 'Vanity Fair' and read one of them during the night. Very good, indeed, beats Dickens out of the world." As a matter of fact, nevertheless, even during the time of the greatest success of "Vanity Fair," only about 6,000 copies of a number were sold, while the circulation of the parts of Dickens's novels was frequently as much as twenty or twenty-five thousand each. We have also the authority of Sara Coleridge for the assertion that, in 1847, "Vanity Fair" was not as popular as "Jane Eyre." But, although "Vanity Fair" may not have appealed to the general public as Dickens and Lever did, or even as "Jane Eyre" did, it is certain that, among the literary class, and what is known as Society, Thackeray now established a foremost place. Such high-class journals as *The Spectator* particularly praised the novel as it was coming out in serial parts. In January, 1848, when rather more than half of the book had already appeared, Abraham Hayward reviewed it in the *Edinburgh Review*, and said: "'Vanity Fair' is as sure of immortality as ninety-nine hundredths of modern novels are sure of annihilation."

Writing on May 4, 1848, Fitzgerald observes: "He is become a great man, and, I am told, goes to Holland House and to Devonshire House, and for some reason or another will not write a word to me; but I am sure this is not because he is asked to Holland House." A couple of months later he wrote: "Thackeray is a great man. Goes to Devonshire House, &c., and his book, which is capital, is read by the great, and will, I hope, do them good." Another old friend, Monckton Milnes, wrote in May, 1849: "Thackeray is winning great social success, dining at the Academy, Sir Robert Peel's, &c. I doubt whether he will be much the happier for it, though I think people generally are for satisfied ambition." Mr. Melville, for his part, has no doubt that, for a man of Thackeray's sensitive temperament, the applause was a glorious stimulant, just the thing that he had been wanting for thirteen years, and which, now that he had obtained it, did not make him content to rest upon his laurels, but urged him on and on to struggle for yet greater honors. He became a lion, and remained a lion to the end of his life. He went everywhere and saw everything. He himself explained his reason for doing so, and it was an ingenious one. "There is no more dangerous or stupefying position for a man in life than to be a cock of small society. It prevents his ideas from growing. It renders him intolerably conceited. A two-penny-half-penny Cæsar, a Brummagen dandy, a coterie philosopher or wit, is pretty sure to be an ass; and, in fine, I lay down as an axiom that it is good for a man to live where he can meet his betters, intellectual and social." He followed his own advice, and went everywhere; to balls, dinners and receptions indiscriminately. Carlyle thought he wasted too much time in this way, and that dinner-eating in fashionable houses was not a salutary discipline for work. Thackeray himself, on the other hand, contended that society was useful and necessary to him. "A social painter must be of the world which he depicts, and native to the manners he portrays," he wrote. And again: "If I don't go out and mingle with society I can't write." This was true enough, as Mr. Melville insists, to a certain extent, for, just as Dickens portrays the lower classes, so was Thackeray the novelist of the higher classes. Still, as a matter of fact, he had not gone much, if at all, into the higher society before he wrote "Vanity Fair." Certain candid friends intimated that he was becoming a tuft-hunter. "Mr. Thackeray has said more and more effectively about snobs and snobism than any other man," wrote Harriet Martineau, "and yet his frittered life and his obedience to the call of the great are the observed of all observers. As it is so, so it must be; but O the pity of it, the pity of it! Great and unusual allowance is to be made in his case, I am aware; but this does not lessen the concern occasioned by the spectacle of one after another of the aristocracy of nature making the ko-to to the aristocracy of accident." "Thackeray has grown a little *blase*," wrote Sir Frederick Pollock in 1849; and, some years later: "Thackeray, after he became famous, liked no subject so well as himself and his books." Fitzgerald, for his part, seems to have noticed no change in him at first. "I have seen Thackeray three or four times. He is just the same. All the world admires 'Vanity Fair,' and the author is courted by dukes and duchesses and wits of both sexes." In the following year, however, he remarked: "Thackeray is in such a great world that I am afraid of him; he gets tired of me, and we are content to regard each other at a distance." Thackeray had a spiteful enemy in Dr. Gordon Hake, who in his Memoirs, says: "He could never realize the independent feelings of those who happen to be born to fortune—a thing which a man of genius should be able to do with ease. Thackeray, as if under the impression that the party was invited to look at him, thought it necessary to make a figure and to attract attention after the dessert, by telling stories, and more than half acting them; the aristocratic party listening, but appearing little amused. George Borrowe knew better how to behave in good company, and kept quiet, though, doubtless, he felt his name." Our author points out that Borrowe may have known how to behave in good company, but he certainly never learned to behave elsewhere.

The contrary evidence marshalled by Mr. Melville is overwhelming. Thackeray never deserted the more strictly intellectual and artistic society of earlier days. Major D—— declared that "perhaps no man was ever so improved by success." Albert Smith, who had formerly been snubbed by the novelist, now insisted that Thackeray was a very jolly fellow, and no "High Art" about him. Similar testimony is borne by Dr. John Brown, John Esten Cooke, Mrs. Kemble, Fields, Reed, James Payn, Dr. Merriman, Bayard Taylor and a great number of other men and women of all classes who met him. "What I saw of Thackeray impressed me with his gentleness and charity," Mr. John Hollinshead has written. "Far from being a cynic, he was more like a good-natured schoolboy." "None of the little aside-sermons which he preached in his books fell by any chance from his lips." Mr. Vizetelly has said. "His placid temper and pleasant courtesy charmed all who came in contact with him. Thackeray was reticent in expressing his opinion upon people whom he did not like, and very rarely said ill-natured things about any one." Mr. Locker Lampson testifies that "Thackeray drew many unto him, for he had engaging as well as fine qualities. He was open-handed and kind-hearted. He had not an overweening opinion of his literary consequence, and he was generous regarding the people whom the world chose to call his rivals." In a word, Mr. Melville refuses to believe that Thackeray, after he became famous, neglected his old friends intentionally. That he did so is a view irreconcilable with his whole character and every action.

Thackeray, in a letter, defended himself against the charge: "When a man gets this character (of being haughty and supercilious to old acquaintances) he never loses it. This opinion once put forth against a man, all his friends believe it, accommodate themselves to the new theory and see coolness where none is meant. They won't allow for the time an immensely enlarged acquaintance occupies, and fancy I am dangling after lords and fine people because I am not so much in their drawing rooms as in former days. They don't know in what a whirl a man plunges who is engaged in my business. Since I began this work of lecturing, besides travelling, reading, seeing people and dining, when I am forced out and long to be quiet—I write at the rate of 5,000 letters a year. I have a heap before me now. Six of them are about lectures—one from an old gentleman whom I met on the railroad, and who sends me his fugitive poems. I must read them, answer them and compliment the old gentleman. Another from a poor widow in bad spelling asking for help. Nobody knows the work until he is in it. Of course, with all this, old friends think you are changed, that you are forsaking them for great people, and so forth, and so forth." No doubt it was the imputation of tuft-hunting that he had in mind when he wrote in "Mr. Brown on Friendship:" "To know young noblemen and brilliant and notorious town bucks and leaders of fashion has this great disadvantage, that, if you talk about them, or are seen with them much, you offend all your friends of middle life. It makes men envious to see their acquaintance better off than themselves." Of course, Thackeray had to pay the inevitable price for his social popularity; the loss of some of his friends of early life. "I like what are called bohemians and fellows of that sort," he told Mr. John Esten Cooke; "I have seen all sorts of society, dukes, duchesses, lords and ladies, authors, actors and painters, and, taken altogether, I think I like painters the best, and bohemians generally. They are more natural and unconventional; they wear their hair on their shoulders if they want, and dress picturesquely and carelessly." Mr. Melville submits that this is not the language of a tuft-hunter nor were the following words likely to come from an idolator of rank: "When I see these magnificent dandies yawning out of White's or caracoling in the park, I like to think that Brummel was the greatest of them all, and that Brummel's father was a footman." At the same time, he thoroughly admired the *je ne sais quoi* that marks the gentleman, and, after all, as our author suggests, a man may like to be in the company of gentlemen without being a snob.

V.

In spite of the fame they brought him, it cannot be said that Thackeray's novels were a pecuniary success, compared with Scott's or Dickens's, or even George Eliot's. The latter received, it will be remembered, £7,000 for "Middlemarch," and £10,000 for "Daniel Deronda." Thackeray, as we have seen, got 1,000 guineas for "Vanity Fair." For "Esmond," Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. paid him £1,250. What he received for "Pendennis," "The Newcomes," and "The Virginians," the author of this biography does not tell us. For "Lovel, the Widower," "The Adventures of Philip," and "Dennis Duval," (posthumously published) which appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*, the publishers paid $50 a page, as they did for all his contributions to that periodical. For editing the *Cornhill*, the first number of which appeared in May, 1860 he received £2,000 a year, but he resigned the position in April, 1862. Taine, in his "Notes on England," mentions that Thackeray, at the height of his success, estimated his yearly earnings at £4,800. Most of what he earned with the pen he spent. On the other hand, his lectures on "The English Humorists" and on "The Four Georges" were carefully invested as a provision for his daughters and for their unfortunate mother in her enforced retirement. He was not 52 when he died; had he lived twenty years longer, he would have amassed, undoubtedly, a considerable fortune. From a pecuniary point of view, it was lucky for Thackeray that he did not succeed in entering Parliament. A seat in the House of Commons would have been a source of continual expense. Nevertheless, although he knew himself entirely unfitted for impromptu speaking, and frequently broke down when he tried to repeat a speech committed to memory, he longed to enter Parliamentary life, and, in 1857, contested in the Liberal interests a vacant seat for the city of Oxford. It is, of course, understood, that, while the University has two members, the city has two members also; the townsmen, and not the gownsmen, were the constituency to which Thackeray appealed. His opponent was Edward Cardwell, then a Peelite, and afterward a Liberal, who became successively Secretary for Ireland, Secretary for the Colonies and Secretary for War, and was, ultimately, raised to the peerage. The gownsmen knew all about him, but the townsmen did not. In the course of the canvass, he wrote to Dickens, urging him to "come down and make a speech and tell them who I am, for I doubt whether more than two of the electors ever heard of me, and I think there be as many as six or eight who have heard of you." The Yates incident had not occurred, but there is no evidence that Dickens responded to this appeal. The contest between Thackeray and Cardwell was conducted with much courtesy and generosity. Thackeray, when on the hustings, chided his supporters for hissing when the name of his opponent was mentioned. A characteristic anecdote was told in the papers at the time by a friend of Thackeray, who was staying with him at his hotel in Oxford. One day during the election, he was looking out of a window, when he saw a crowd hustling and hooting some of Mr. Cardwell's supporters. Thackeray started up with an oath, and rushed down to the street, notwithstanding the efforts of some old electioneerers who wished to hold him back. He was next seen towering above the crowd, dealing about him right and left, in defense of his opponent's partizans, and in defiance of his own friends. Mr. Melville compares this actual occurrence with an extract from "The Newcomes," the last number of which had been published about two years before: "When Sir Barnes and his staff were hustled in the market place and most outrageously shoved, jeered and jolted, the Colonel from the King's Arms organized a rapid sally which he himself headed, with his bamboo cane, cut out Sir Barnes and his followers from the hands of the mob, and addressed these ruffians in a noble speech of which the bamboo-cane, Englishmen, shame, fair play were the most emphatic expressions." Thackeray made a stout fight but in spite of all his endeavors, he was unsuccessful; when the result was announced by the Mayor the number stood, Cardwell, 1,085; Thackeray, 1,018. Thackeray said in his speech after the declaration of the poll: 'Let me tell you a little story, but a true one. Some years ago, when boxing was more common in this country than it is at the present time, two celebrated champions met to fight a battle on Moulsey Heath. Their names were Gully and Gregson. They fought the most tremendous battle that had been known for many long years, and Gregson got the worst of it. As he was lying on his bed some time afterward, blinded and his eyes shut up, he asked a friend to give him something to drink. A person in the room handed him some drink and grasped him by the hand. 'Whose hand is this?' asked Gregson. ''Tis Jack Gully's,' was the reply. Now Gregson was the man who was beaten and Gully was the conqueror and he was the first man to shake him by the hand to show him that he had no animosity against him. This should be the conduct of all loyal Englishmen, to fight a good fight, and to hold no animosity against the opposite side. With this feeling I go away from Oxford."

Whether Thackeray would have been successful in Parliamentary life the present biographer finds it difficult to say with certainty. It is well known that Trollope, an extremely candid friend, was of the opinion that Thackeray in the House of Commons would have been a disastrous failure. It is undeniable that his health was bad and that his habits were still irregular, and, though there is no doubt he would have done his duty, it probably would soon have become irksome to him. He was not a man to have obeyed the orders of his party's whip unhesitatingly. He was the last person in the world to have believed his friends to be always right and his opponents always wrong, and he would have voted against his party whenever he thought it was in error. He was too philosophical to have developed into a leader of the House, for he could not help seeing that there are always at least two sides to every question; he would not have invariably possessed the conviction so needful for success in the House of Commons that his party's view must be the correct one. He would have been, in short, a "trimmer," or what we call now a "Mugwump," and, by his defeat, the Secretary to the Treasury escaped much worry and annoyance, while, on the other hand, there is no doubt that Cardwell was a born statesman, and did good work in all the offices he filled.

VI.

We have said that one of the reasons for Thackeray's resignation of the editorship of the *Cornhill Magazine* was that he found editorial work too painful to go on with. "How can I go into society with comfort?" he asked a friend. "I dined the other day at ———'s, and at the table were four gentlemen whose masterpieces of literature I had been compelled to decline with thanks." In "Thorns in the Cushion" he told of the "thorn letters" he received. He even quoted one, and, commenting on it, said, "Here is the case put with true feminine logic: 'I am poor; I am good; I am ill; I work hard; I have a sick mother and hungry brothers and sisters dependent on me. You can help us if you will.' And then I look at the paper with a thousandth part of a faint hope that it may be suitable, and I find it won't do, and I knew it wouldn't do; and why is this poor lady to appeal to my pity, and bring her little ones kneeling to my bedside, and calling for bread which I can give them if I choose." The present biographer dares swear that, in many such an instance, Thackeray would accept the manuscript though he never printed it, and would pay the writer with a check on his private account. To recur to his editorial annoyances, the authors of rejected manuscripts spent much time in writing insulting letters to Thackeray, and the members of the *corps de ballet* at the Theatre Royal, Donnybrook, held an animated, though one-sided, correspondence with him with regard to an incident in "Lovell, the Widower."

Thackeray told James Payn how a young fellow had sent him a long story for which he demanded particular attention from "the greatest of novelists," upon the ground that he had a sick sister entirely dependent upon him for support, and how, being touched by the appeal, he wrote to his correspondent a long letter of advice, enclosing also some pecuniary assistance. "I feel for your position," he said, "and appreciate your motive for exertion. But I must tell you at once that you will never do anything in literature. Your contribution is worthless in every way, and it is the truest kindness, both to her for whom you are working and to yourself, to tell you so straight. Turn your mind at once to some other industry." This produced a reply which was couched in the most offensive terms conceivable, and which ended by telling "the greatest of novelists" that, although he had attained, by good luck, the top of the tree, he would one day find himself where he deserved to be, at the bottom of it. To quote from Thackeray's own reflections on this subject, which we are sure are echoed by many a kind-hearted editor: "Ah me! We wound where we never intended to strike; we create anger where we never meant harm; and these thoughts are the thorns in our cushion. There is no man, I suppose, who, out of mere malignity, would like to make enemies. But here in this editorial business, you can't do otherwise, and a queer, sad, strange, bitter thought it is, that must ever cross the mind of many a public man. Do what I will, be innocent or spiteful, be generous or cruel, there are A and B and C and D who will hate me to the end of the chapter—to the chapter's end—to the *finis* of the page—when hate and envy fortune and disappointment shall be over."

When Thackeray penned these words, the chapter's end was for him not far distant. He had had many severe illnesses, and these had wrought much injury to his constitution, apart from the internal disease that produced the terrible spasms of pain to which he was subject. In addition to these troubles, late hours and lack of necessary exercise, coupled with tremendous continuous brain work, had made it absolutely imperative that he should take care of himself. "I asked him," Mr. Hodder has recorded, "if he had ever received the best medical advice. 'Certainly I have,' was the reply, 'but what is the use of advice, if you don't follow it?' he continued. 'They tell me not to drink, and I *do* drink. They tell me not to smoke, and I *do* smoke. They tell me not to eat, and I *do* eat. In short, I do everything I am desired not to do, and, therefore, what am I to expect?'" His method of working was injurious to his health. "I can conceive nothing more harassing in the literary way," Motley wrote in 1858 to his wife, "than Thackeray's way of living from hand to mouth. I mean in regard to the way he furnishes food to the printer's devil. "Here he is just finishing the number that must appear in a few days. Of course, whether ill or well, stupid or fertile, he must produce the same amount of fun, pathos or sentiment. His gun must be regularly loaded and discharged at command. I should think it would wear his life out." It did wear his life out. Dickens told Fields that when he looked at Thackeray lying in his coffin, he wondered that the figure he had known in life as of such noble presence could seem so shrunken and wasted. His hands were quite thin, like those of an old man of eighty. About this time (1862), Thackeray told his cousin: "I have taken too many crops out of my brain." He was undoubtedly overworked and disinclined to write. "I would like to rest my head in some quiet corner," he said to Miss Perry one day, when his number for the *Cornhill* was nearly due. "I had a nice scene this morning, but it is all gone, and I cannot call to mind a bit of it now." "I never take up the pen without an effort. I work only from necessity," he told another friend. It was about the year 1860 that he wrote to an old Charterhouse schoolfellow: "The carriage is going down hill, isn't it? Mine is, after having had some pleasant travelling, after being well nigh upset, after being patched up again, after being robbed by footpads, &c. The terminus can't be far off—a few years more or less." Indeed, Thackeray knew that the end was near, and he told his friend, Mr. Synge, when that gentleman was leaving England for some years: "I want to tell you that I shall never see you again. I feel that I am doomed." A few days before Christmas, 1863, Thackeray and Dickens met on the steps of the Athenæum Club; they had not spoken since the Yates affair. They passed each other, and then Thackeray turned back, and, with outstretched hand, went up to Dickens and said he could no longer bear to be on any but the old terms of friendship; and the men shook hands heartily, and once again were friends. Sir Theodore Martin, who had witnessed the reconciliation, afterward remarked: "The next time I saw Dickens he was looking down into the grave of his great rival in Kensal Green." On Wednesday, Dec. 22, 1863, Thackeray was seen in Palace Gardens, reading a book. "On Dec. 24," says Dr. Merriman, "I was summoned about 8 A. M., to Palace Gardens, to find him lying dead in his bed. Life had been extinct for some hours. Effusion had taken place into his great and powerful brain and he had passed away in the night into a better country where there is no night."

In a chapter on "Thackeray, the Writer," Mr. Melville admits that public opinion is not, nor ever has been, entirely unanimous with regard to the position which should be awarded to Thackeray in English literature. Mrs. Jameson declared that "Pendennis" and "Esmond" "would never do." She particularly objected to Laura and to Lady Castlewood. "Such women may exist," she wrote, "but to hold them up as examples of excellence, as fit objects of our best sympathies, is a fault, and proves a low standard in ethics and in art." "As usual, he is unjust to women—quite unjust," wrote Charlotte Bronte. "There is hardly any punishment he does not deserve for making Lady Castlewood peep through a keyhole, listen at a door, and be jealous of a boy and a milkmaid." Harriet Martineau thought that "the first drawback in his books, as in his manners, is the impression conveyed by both that he could never have known a good and sensible woman." More recently, Mr. Harrison has written in the same strain; he can find but two or three admirable characters in Thackeray's works. Ruskin prefers Dickens to Thackeray. For the latter, at one time, he conceived something approaching dislike. In Fors Clavigera he wrote: "Thackeray settled like a meat fly on whatever one had for dinner, and made one sick of it." Matthew Arnold did not greatly admire him, and never disguised the fact that his private opinion of him differed widely from the general verdict. "Thackeray is not, I think, a great writer," he observed, though he was bound to admit that "at any rate, his style is that of one."

On the other hand, Edward Fitzgerald said: "Thackeray, you know, could go deeper into the Springs of Common Action than these ladies"; he was referring to Jane Austen and George Eliot. Again, speaking of Disraeli's "Lothair" he said: "The book is like a pleasant magic lantern; when it is over, I shall forget it, and shall want to return to what I do not forget; some of Thackeray's monumental figures of *pauvre humanite*, as old Napoleon calls it; humanity in its depths, not in its superficial appearances." Tennyson's profound admiration for Thackeray is a tradition in the poet's family. Not long ago his son told a friend that his father "always regarded Thackeray as the head of English literature of the Victorian era." Carlyle said to Sir C. G. Duffy that "Thackeray had more reality in him, and would cut up into a dozen Dickenses." In 1858 he wrote to Emerson: "Thackeray is a big fellow, soul and body, of many gifts and qualities, particularly in the Hogarth lines, with a dash of Sterne superadded." We may note, finally, what Robert Louis Stevenson has said of Thackeray's philosophy: "I call it a gospel; it is the best I know. Error, and suffering, and failure, and death, those calamities that our contemporaries paint upon so vast a scale, they are all depicted here, but in a more true proportion. We may return before this picture to the simple and ancient faith. We may be sure (although we know not why) that we give our lives, like coral insects, to build up insensibly, in the twilight of time, the reef of righteousness. And we may be sure (although we see not how) it is a thing worth doing."

M. W. H.